

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

SOCIETIES, like individuals, have their moral crises and their spiritual revolutions. The student can observe the results which these cataclysms produce, but he can hardly without presumption attempt to appraise them, for it is at the fire which they kindled that his own small taper has been lit. The rise of a naturalistic science of society, with all its magnificent promise of fruitful action and of intellectual light; the abdication of the Christian Churches from departments of economic conduct and social theory long claimed as their province; the general acceptance by thinkers of a scale of ethical values, which turned the desire for pecuniary gain from a perilous, if natural, frailty into the idol of philosophers and the mainspring of society—such movements are written large over the history of the tempestuous age which lies between the Reformation and the full light of the eighteenth century. Their consequences have been worked into the very tissue of modern civilization. Posterity still stands too near their source to discern the ocean into which these streams will flow.

In an historical age the relativity of political doctrines is the tritest of commonplaces. But social

psychology
continues too often to be discussed in serene
indifference
to the categories of time and place, and
economic
interests are still popularly treated as
though they
formed a kingdom over which the *Zeitgeist*
bears no
sway. In reality, though inherited
dispositions may be
constant from generation to generation,
the system of
valuations, preferences, and ideals—the
social environ-
ment within which individual character
functions—is in
process of continuous change, and it is in
the conception